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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000007

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [KHUM](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: PRESIDENTIAL POLITICAL ADVISER HOLDS OUT HOPE FOR  
FOREIGN RADIO BROADCASTS RETURN

REF: BAKU 0006

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires Donald Lu, Reasons 1.4 (b and d).

1. (C) Summary: After listening to warnings from UK Ambassador and the Charge that the ouster of VOA, Radio Liberty and the BBC from Azerbaijan's FM airwaves could seriously harm relations with the EU and the USG, Presidential Administration Social Policy Chief Ali Hasanov replied that "we are not at a dead end." He promised to consult with President Aliyev and Presidential Administration Chief Ramiz Mehdiyev on the next steps to resolve the issue. An oft-combative interlocutor, Hasanov calmly repeated the GOAJ line that the December 30 decision was simply a step toward bringing the broadcasts in line with the 2002 broadcast media law. But he pointed again to the possibility of an intergovernmental agreement as a means of returning the broadcasts to the FM airwaves, and urged that BBG and BBC representatives engage in negotiations soon. He declined, however, to accept specific dates for opening talks, asking for time to consult with President Aliyev and Mehdiyev. End Summary.

British Take A Tough Line

2. (C) To underscore the common U.S.-UK-EU position regarding the removal of foreign broadcasts from public airwaves, the Charge and UK Ambassador Carolyn Browne, joined by the PAO, met with Presidential Administration Political Chief Ali Hasanov January 7. Stressing that her stern points were being delivered under instructions from London, Ambassador Browne warned that the effective closure of radio broadcasts could damage Azerbaijan's standing across the EU and negatively affect its Eastern Partnership agreement. She emphasized that the current problem, roundly criticized across Europe, is one of the government's own making, she repeatedly made the offer, "How can we help you resolve your problem?"

3. (C) The Charge told Hasanov that the USG is deeply disappointed by the National TV and Radio Council (NTRC) decision and the permanent removal of VOA, BBC and RFE/RL broadcasts from FM frequencies would be considered an unfriendly act, resulting in consequences for our bilateral relations. The Charge noted that the NTRC decision was an unpleasant surprise because of the series of assurances that Embassy, BBG and senior Washington visitors received from GOAJ officials. The Charge urged Hasanov to begin negotiations soon on an intergovernmental agreement that

would return the broadcasts to the FM airwaves as well as to allow broadcasts during the period of negotiations.

"We Are Not at a Dead End"

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¶4. (C) Hasanov matter-of-factly denied that the closures were linked to political concerns about Radio Liberty's broadcasts, repeating the NTRC line that the decision was based on law, not politics. Nodding to indicate that he understood the possible consequences, Hasanov said "we are not at a dead end" and promised to consult immediately with President Aliyev and Presidential Administration Chief Mehdiyev on the next steps, including possible near-term negotiations. Noting that if the President determines that he would like to "share the airwaves" with foreign broadcasters, an intergovernmental agreement could be negotiated that would take precedence over the broadcast media legislation. While clearly focused on the intergovernmental agreement, Hasanov even revisited past options, including renewing the expired broadcast licenses for a year while negotiations proceed or changing the current legislation.

¶5. (C) Charge also raised the issue of Ministry of Communications January 6 threats to shut down Radio Liberty's internal satellite links as an example of media harassment (reftel). Hasanov claimed to have no information about the issue, but promised to look into it.

¶6. (C) Comment: While the meeting did not produce a firm

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date for negotiations or any concrete promises, Hasanov also did not seek to end the dialogue over foreign broadcasts. He actively tried to convince his British and American interlocutors that there were near-term possibilities for bringing these three broadcasters back on the FM frequency. We cautioned him that Washington and London would be looking for quick signs of political will to move forward on restoring these broadcasts. This very well may be more disinformation from a government that has attempted to deceive the USG and European Governments repeatedly over this sensitive issue. On the other hand, pursuing these negotiations in tandem with high-level interaction with President Aliyev is the best chance we have of restoring these broadcasts for the long-haul. The Embassy will request that the BBG send a letter of invitation to Hasanov to come to Prague within the next two weeks to commence talks.

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